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THE RIVER:

A SONG OF HUMAN LIFE.

By ALA,

Author of "The Silent Dormitory and Other Poems," "Disciple-
ship," "The Two Paths," etc.

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JOHN LOCKWOOD,
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WHAT IF SHE NE'ER RETURN!

Mother is gone ; her empty chair I see,

Gone! but, please God, she cometh soon again.

O joy! she cometh back again to me.

What if she ne'er return! To her, sweet gain,

To me immeasurable loss and pain.

I dare not think of that distressful day

When from the window I shall gaze in vain

For her returning steps, unwont to stray,

That come no more, howe'er with breaking heart I pray.



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Out of a dingle wild
I came, dear Nature's child,
A brooklet undefiled,
 As crystal clear.
I danced to see the light
Of the pure heaven so bright,
And sparkled at the sight
 Of sunbeams near.

Out of the great mystery, the Human Soul is ushered
into the world, at birth, in immaculate innocence
and perfect beauty.

Shot by the sun's strong bow,
They pierced me through and through—
'T was but their way to show
 Their welcome sweet.
By mossy rocks I played,
'Twixt banks of fern I strayed,
In cozy nooks delayed
 My baby-feet.

Absorbing mother-love greets it, and it soon finds
its way to the delights which kindly Nature has
provided for it on every side.

There laughing zephyrs came
Breathing love's blissful name,
But innocent of shame

I heeded not :

With gleeful strife and din
They pressed my cheeks and chin,
They pressed love-dimples in,
Then kissed the spot.

Being wholly unacquainted with sin, the babe is
unaffected by its approaches.

Unmoved to love's delay
Eftsoons I slipped away,
For I would be at play
 Amid my toys:
The pebbles at my feet,
Whereon as harpchords sweet
I swept my fingers fleet,
 Sang of my joys.

Impatient of dalliance, it seeks its playthings with
glee, and coos its innocent happiness.

Lured by my dancing wave,
For me the wild-bird gave
His wood-notes gay and grave
 In shade and shine ;
Swinging from tree to tree,
So fearless and so free,
The squirrel played for me
 His antics fine.

Finding in Nature a response to every desire, it
more and more seeks her sympathetic companion-
ship.

Unto my pebbly brink
Came creatures wild to drink—
Duck, otter, weasel, mink—
And plash and play :
Happy betwixt my banks,
I watched their brimming pranks,
And heard their noisy thanks
The livelong day.

Pets are drawn to the child, who is in turn attracted
to them.

By pool and waterfall,
By rapids great and small,
I heard the red fox call

His loitering mate.

I heard the panther's growl,
I heard the lone wolf's howl,
I heard the midnight owl

Hoot his " Too late ! "

With observant eyes the child gradually gets acquainted with its sweet companion, Nature,

By many a soft cascade
Whose melody delayed
Whatever footsteps strayed
 Within their spells,
By many a grassy bed
With strawberries white and red
And violets interspread
 And lily-bells,

and with advancing years grows in sweetness and
beauty ;

There poets loitered long
My rocks and rills among
And caught a loftier song—

Diviner fire :

There lovers came to find
In me a purer mind,
An essence more refined
Than love's desire.

and begins to get glimpses of the deeper significance
and beauty and purity of the world.

Thus many a day and mile
My life was one sweet smile,
With naught that could defile
 My earth-pure stream ;
Nor shadows that oft creep
O'er life's serenest sleep
Came to disturb my deep
 And golden dream.

It begins to perceive that it has a share in the untainted splendor of the universe,

At length not far away,
Where slept the sun all day,
I found a meadow gay
 With daffodils;
There the lush grass was green,
And there the floral sheen
Lay beautiful between
 The sun-kissed hills.

and enters completely into the enjoyment of the

There children golden-tressed,
By sunbeams soft caressed,
All day the cool grass pressed
With knees and feet.

With them fond zephyrs played
And round their lips delayed ;
O who could them upbraid?—
So pure, so sweet !

innocent loveliness of the world.

I watched them, boys and girls,
Their locks in tangled whorls
Of dandelion curls,
 That fairies know;
And they wore coronets
Of braided violets
More beautiful than frets
 A royal brow.

Nature, the indulgent mother, companions the spot-
less and beautiful

Their necklaces were made
Of buttercups abraid,
With clover leaves inlaid—

Ah, pretty weeds !

What they called “cheeses” round
On hollyhocks they found,
And these with grass they bound
To make them beads.

child of her bosom, inducting it into her mysteries

They chased with footsteps sly
And bonnets poised on high
The painted butterfly—
 That wingéd flower ;
Till, hushed their noisy glee,
Beneath some spreading tree
Gave up each little knee
 To slumber's hour.

of innocent happiness.

Of this fair spot possessed
I loitered long at rest
Nor had within my breast
Or thought or care.
I let my music die,
Content, stagnant, to lie
And gaze into the sky
With vacant stare.

Passive to these influences it becomes enervated, not having yet discovered that it has a positive and commanding work of its own to do.

By scarce-seen affluents new,
Fed by the rain and dew,
More and more strong I grew ;
But lo, there crept

But conscience not having yet awakened, the child knows nothing of sin, and so has not learned to be on its guard against temptation. From a mixed

Out of obscurity
Rills of impurity,
While in security
Fancied I slept,

environment, evil influences approach it along with good ones, and the soul is contaminated, though yet sinless, before it is aware.

Then on my garments' sheen

A track of stain was seen ;

Behold I was unclean !

Not quite in vain

Conscience awakens, and reason begins to discriminate between worthy and unworthy objects of pursuit. Fruits which reason has disapproved are

The pitying sun looked down,
(For this he hath his crown),
To cleanse my baby gown
Of this first stain.

tasted, and the taint of sin follows. This taint the just-awakened spiritual force of the soul strives to remove.

But more and more—O shame!—
Turbid my stream became ;
Matters not whose the blame,
Mine was the cross.

Sorrow follows condemnation, but it is not deep enough to enable the soul to resist triumphantly the allurements of pleasure ; nor is the understanding yet sufficiently enlightened to give proper weight to

O this vile influence !

O this base indolence !

Lost was my innocence—

Ah me ! the loss !

the dangers of temptation, and thus the soul's purity is more and more stained with sin. Innocence is gone for ever.

Near this sweet glade I found
A mill whereat I ground
For all the farmers round
Their golden grain.

But under the action of the mighty forces now at work, the understanding develops rapidly, the will takes command, defensive works are erected at the weak points, and the soul, fortified and guarded against surprise, is secure. The youth begins to see

More and more wheels beside
I turned with my swift tide,
And heard the shuttles glide
With might and main.

that he has a place in the great world's work, the voice of Duty is heard and obeyed, and in the hum of industry the calls of the tempting siren, though heard, are unheeded.

Then on I ran in haste,
With all my waters waste,
My turbid stream more chaste
 For good work done ;
My dreams 'mid rocks and rills,
With babes and daffodils,
My service in the mills
 All past and gone.

Useful occupation gives the spiritual forces a chance to cleanse the soul, which now bids farewell to self-indulgence, frivolity, and idle dreaming, and even to the rougher forms of industrial activity,

By quiet farms I swept,
By hamlets still that slept,
By villages I crept,
 And on and on.
I heard the lambs repeat
Their soft, heart-touching bleat
Beneath the fervid heat
 Of summer's sun.

and enters, with a due sense of its allotted part, upon

I heard the piping quail,
I heard the black crow rail,
And, near, the threshing-flail
 On the barn floor.
The hovering hawk I saw—
A king whose might is law—
Eying with hungry maw
 The barnyard o'er.

life's momentous work.

Down to my brimming brink
Came flock and herd to drink,
And birds to preen and prink
 Their plumage gay.

I made the cool morass
Where in the tall, coarse grass
The cattle loved to pass
 Half the hot day.

The noble youth becomes a helper to those less
able, a creator of beneficent instrumentalities,

The sun-loved golden grain,
Faint with my long disdain,
With the cool lips of the rain

At length I kissed.

Also, the tryst to renew,
I sent my daughters true,
Soft-footed fog and dew

And shrouding mist.

though at first, from mental preoccupation, considered cold and distant.

In a cradle of silk the corn
Has nestled since it was born,
And the silk will never be torn
Till the grain be ripe.
The farmer will ne'er take his ease
Till he 's gathered the golden fleece ;
When his granary full he sees,
He lights his pipe.

His industry bears rich fruit ;

He quietly ridges his brows
As he sees his well-stuffed mows,
And thinks of his good milch-cows

In the winter's cold.

He opens and looks in his bins,
He slams them shut and grins,
And chuckles under his chins

At sight of his gold.

he prospers and is glad.

Now I have ships that glide
Forth and far on my tide,
And I feel the pulse of the wide,
Majestic sea ;
And cities crowd to my shore,
Where money-kings sit in the door
Of their tents of smoke, whose roar
Comes ever to me.

He engages in trade and commerce, founds cities,
and becomes a money-king.

I give the breath of my tide
To the atmosphere, my bride,
And away to the north it doth ride

On the southwind's wings.

Then it falls in a gentle rain
To nourish the thirsty grain,
And quickly joins me again

In the rills and springs.

His beneficent influence extends far and wide.

In the dusk the fisherman sets
In my current deep his nets,
And patiently awaits
Dawn o'er the hills ;
Then he draws his nets, and behold !
Up from my waters cold
What beauties ! good as gold ;
And his boat he fills.

His touch awakens the correlated forces of healthful
business activity,

Quick to the city streets
Come up the fishing fleets,
And them the huckster greets
 With a laugh in his sides ;
Then the huckster hawks my fish,
And the poor child hath its wish,
And shouts at the smoking dish
 The River provides.

and brings to the community the blessings of prosperity and happiness.

At anchor there in my bay
Are ships from lands far away
Across the sea and the day,
 With treasures unguessed.
The ships will be laden again
With riches of mountain and plain,
And, home-going pigeons, amain
 Will fly to their nest.

His ships sail every sea,

With these my shuttles of trade
The Cloth of Gold I braid,
Whose beauty never shall fade ;
That shall cover the world—
The Gospel of Love and Peace,
Whose jubilance never shall cease,
Whose banners shall float in the breeze,
Ne'er to be furled.

sowing in distant lands the seeds of universal fraternity, and teaching and spreading over the whole earth the gospel of peace and good-will to men.

And now my goal is won ;
The River's work, begun
In the far hills, is done ;
The bar is passed.
Cleansed by thy purity,
O all-embracing sea,
I am absorbed in thee,
Rest ! rest ! at last.

Old age comes on at last, crowned with success and peaceful joy, and death and apparent absorption in the soul of the universe ends the scene.

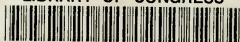




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